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Abstract

This article considers Allan Ramsay's reception in Scottish and English newspapers, magazines and literary periodicals in the one hundred and fifty years following his earliest, career-setting publications and the first volume of his poems, published in 1721. It analyses his literary afterlives in two sections: 1) 1720–1800, in which commentators and reviewers give immediate responses to Ramsay's life and works and in which his reception diversifies with the prominence, later in the century, of Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns; and 2) 1800–1870, a period in which the reading public, the literary marketplace and its contexts are undergoing rapid evolution. The article argues that Ramsay's role as a well-spring of Scots vernacular poetry is influential on the reception of Fergusson and Burns, but also that the prominence, particularly of Burns, in turn affects Ramsay's reception as the eighteenth century moves into the nineteenth. It reads Ramsay through reviews, anecdotes and polemical pieces, demonstrating that Ramsay not only influenced the course of Scots vernacular poetry throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also the priorities and preferences of those who were responsible for constructing the canon of Scottish literature in the period.

Allan Ramsay's (1684–1758) is a constant presence in British periodicals throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From his first 'official' appearance in print with the 1721 Ruddiman edition of his *Poems*, Ramsay is a source of comment in periodical literature across Scotland and beyond.[1] With the advent of Robert Fergusson (1750–74) and, more importantly, the enduring popularity of Robert Burns (1759–96), Ramsay returns regularly to the pages of the periodical press. In these publications, the immediate

response to Ramsay's work can be traced, as can his steadily increasing reputation, for at least a significant period before Burns, as Scotland's national poet. In some ways, the periodicals give a predictable result: while there is not a great deal of critical engagement with Ramsay's output in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, interest in Ramsay's life, work and legacy spikes at meaningful moments. There is fresh critical engagement when a new edition of Ramsay's work is issued, but also when, for example, Burns comes to international prominence. Unsurprisingly, *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725; 1729) is at the heart of Ramsay's popular reputation throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, the Scots language is a particular topic of periodicals discussion with regard to Ramsay's diverse output; fierce debates ensue when translations (into 'standard' English) of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* are published. Ramsay's reception is complex when viewed through the linguistic lens.

For the purposes of this article, Ramsay's afterlives can be split into two periods. Periodicals discussions from 1720–1800 give immediate readings of Ramsay's cultural contributions. When his Scots vernacular successors (as they are portrayed by traditional Scottish criticism), Fergusson and Burns, gain popularity from, respectively, the 1770s and the 1780s, Ramsay's reputation evolves and diversifies. Although often lauded as an originator; as the wellspring of Scots 'vernacular revival', Ramsay is, as the century progresses, understood with a backward glance, and through the critical lens as coloured by the later productions of, particularly, Burns. As the traditional critical construction goes, Ramsay initiates the 'revival' and Fergusson keeps the seat warm, all in preparation for the advent of Burns.

These constructions began early and held fast. In a biographical note on Fergusson in his *Ancient Scottish Poems* (1786), John Pinkerton writes: 'This young man, tho much inferior to the next poet, had talents for Scottish poetry far above those of Allan Ramsay'.[2] Pinkerton is therefore responsible for introducing a critical construction of eighteenth-century Scottish poetry as, in A. B. Grosart's words, one of 'pseudo-apostolic'[3] succession and poetic 'progress' from Ramsay to Fergusson and culminating in Burns. Ramsay sits, according to this construction, at the bottom of the triumvirate. Fergusson makes improvements, and Burns represents the apex of the Scottish canon. If, as Robert Crawford has argued, Fergusson is 'Burns's John the Baptist',[4] Ramsay prophesies the coming of the prophet.

1800–1870 offers a new view of Ramsay, as the reading public and its

contexts evolve. By now, Ramsay appears not just as a manifestation of the Scottish literary canon and its history, but of Scottish identity itself. This is also the period in which new editions of his work are regularly released, and in which *The Gentle Shepherd* is at the height of its popularity, on the page and stage. The nineteenth century is, as is well known, the zenith of periodicals publishing. This is a time when those Scottish periodicals giants – the *Edinburgh Magazine*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Scots Magazine* – were dominating the marketplace. These high-profile and well-distributed publications were interested in Ramsay's work, but so too were smaller newspapers published in a number of British cities, including and beyond Edinburgh and London. My analysis of Ramsay's afterlives in this period is focused through these lesser-known papers.

1720–1800

In the early eighteenth century, Ramsay is present in a wide range of British magazines in book advertisements. These advertisements are evidence of the formidable publicity drive around Ramsay's work. In these early years, too, Ramsay's name appears regularly in advertisements as a bookseller. Occasionally, he is also a correspondent, such as with his letter to the *British Journal* of 14 November 1724, in which he objects to the printing of 'Part of my Ode on the Death of the young Dutchess of *Hamilton*, with some Alterations; nothing to its advantage'.[5] Ramsay asks that it be reprinted in the original, a gesture 'that perhaps may meet with an Opportunity to make you a suitable Return'; the paper duly follows his instruction. This early care for his literary property is evidence of Ramsay's shrewd, bookseller's sense of his own position in the literary marketplace.

From the 1730s, a sustained critical engagement with Ramsay's works begins, thanks to the publication of collections that would cement his literary reputation: *Poems* was published in 1721; it was followed by *The Tea-Table Miscellany* (1723, 1726 and 1727), *The Ever Green* (1724), *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) and *Scots Proverbs* (1737). By now, according to Murray Pittock, Ramsay was 'the favourite of many of the great Scottish families'.[6] It is no surprise, then, that his is an emphatic presence in the periodical press: now editors publish extracts from Ramsay's poetry. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* of August 1737, 'To the Honourable Duncan Forbes of Culloden' is printed.[7] In the *Scots Magazine* of January 1777, 'To Miss Christy Brand'

appears.[8] In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for September 1742, 'To DAPHNIS and THIRSIS, two Irish Shepherds, who, upon a report of Allan Ramsay's Death, sung his ELEGY in pastoral verse' is published.[9] This poem is probably inspired by a piece entitled 'A Pastoral Dialogue between Daphnis and Thirsis occasioned on the Death of Mr John Philips', which had appeared in a miscellany titled *Delights for the Ingenious: or, a Monthly Entertainment for the Curious of Both Sexes* (May 1711).[10] It is humorous and simultaneously self-deprecating and elevating, considering the (albeit satirical) comparison of the outpouring of grief at Philips's death to false reports of Ramsay's demise, but its appearance in the *Gentleman's Magazine* demonstrates Ramsay's centrality to the British literary marketplace. Many of these printed pieces are characterised by the complex cultural cues typical of Ramsay's satirical works. In this, according to Pittock, 'Ramsay's injection of demotic realism into prestigious literary forms associated with subject matter in an altogether "higher" register was one which preserved Scottish literature's altermentality both through subject-matter and distinct speech, as well as in the process inflecting genre towards a distinctively Scottish agenda.'[11]

Alongside this evident readers' expectation to see Ramsay's work in their periodicals' poetry sections is an increasing tendency to print correspondents' poems which are either in tribute to, or in the style of Ramsay. These pieces, while variable in their quality, nonetheless give illuminating snapshots of contemporary public opinion. An early example, printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1744, is 'A Pastoral on the Death of Alexander Pope, Esq; In Imitation of Allan Ramsay', which appears as a conversation between Jemmie, Simie and Patie.[12] The poem, which imitates Ramsay's pastoral dialogues including 'Richy and Sandy', emulates Ramsay's style and, less convincingly, the Scots vernacular. It begins:

> The deeth o' *Pope*! gud Godds, is *Sawny* deid,
> An tane his jurny to th' elysian shade!
> I canno' blame thy sighs, an teirs, sin hevin
> Sae just a patent to thy grief hais given:
> The churl, whase niggard ene wald no disburse
> A teir, ower a tendir fader's herse,
> Cud no forbear t' outweep a winter shour,
> To think immartal *Sawney* is nae mare.

This poem, signed 'J.R.' and dated 'Stockton, Aug. 21. 1774', demonstrates that Ramsay's was deemed a useful model for such major literary events south of the border. Similarly, the *Newcastle General Magazine* for December 1756 prints 'Mr Somerville's' 'To Mr Allan Ramsay, upon his publishing his second Volume of Poems'.[13] Somerville offers a tribute to Ramsay as '*Caledonian* bard! whose rural strains/Delight the list'ning hills, and chear the plains!' Ramsay is here the untutored, rustic genius who is 'Already polish'd by some hand divine'. Somerville urges him to, 'like the sun, shine forth/In native lustre, and intrinsick worth'. Tributes such as these demonstrate that this 'bard' was navigating the British literary marketplace; indeed, the stanza closes with the proclamation that '*Allan* is now what *Homer* was before'. Poet-readers respond to Ramsay's work in tributes such as this, but also to Ramsay's self-construction as undeserving of 'the eminent character that belongs to the Epick Master'.[14]

Ramsay died on 7 January 1758. Although an obituary has yet to be found, poetic tributes followed swiftly. In the *Scots Magazine* for January 1758, 'To the Memory of Mr Allan Ramsay' by 'Cleanthes', appears.[15] This is no Scots vernacular tribute, but a traditional, English language elegy. It portrays the shepherd, whose talent lies 'where mirth and wit conspire/To raise the laugh, warm'd by the Muse's fire:/Where innocence, where artless nature shines,/And simple elegance adorns the lines.' Established here is Ramsay as autodidact poet-genius, and already, *The Gentle Shepherd* is the apex of his achievement: 'Above the rest, the GENTLE SHEPHERD charm'd,/That matchless piece! by real genius form'd,/To move the tend'rest feelings of the heart,/By simple nature's unaffected art.' This diction is analogous to that found in tributes to Burns, offered during his life and after his death, in which he is lauded as the 'heaven-taught ploughman'. The response to Ramsay's death demonstrates his powerful influence, not simply in terms of how his work and defiant literary and linguistic stance influenced subsequent poets, but also the way in which his poetic approach – and, most importantly, critical reactions to it – defined many of the priorities of the constructors of the Scottish canon for the coming century and beyond.

The *London Evening Post* of 2–4 February 1758 carries the anonymous 'Elegy on the Death of Allan Ramsay'.[16] The speaker exhorts:

> Blow loud, ye blust'ring Winds! ye Clouds, o'ercast!
> Gae, chilling Frosts, and bind the Rivers fast!
> Let ARTHUR'S Seat, and ilka tow'ring Hight,
> Be wrapt in Snaw, or lost in dreary Night.
> Sic gloomy Scenes best suit with our Despair;
> The Swain that sang sae sweet is now nae mair!
> What now sae blyth shall tune the winsome Reed,
> That springs on *Winding Tay*, or *Banks of Tweed*?
> Wha of the *Broom of Cowdenknows* shall tell,
> And sing of *Mary Scot*, or *Bessy Bell*?
> Or wha *the bonny Bush aboon Traquair*?
> Since RAMSAY'S dead, and Musick is nae mair?

Reminiscent of Ramsay's own elegies, and his inheritance from Robert Sempill and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, this piece sees Ramsay as a tradition-bearer; as gatekeeper for Scottish (song) culture. In the *St. James's Chronicle* for 17–19 November 1778, 'J.H.' publishes 'Verses Written in a blank Leaf of Allan Ramsay's Poems',[17] which describes him as one 'Who sing'st the best of any Scot,/That ever Caledon could shaw', and celebrates the 'matchless Genius of fam'd Allan'.

From the 1780s, a new debate emerges concerning Ramsay's legacy, which centres on the afterlives of *The Gentle Shepherd*. In the *European Magazine* for January 1782, there appears a short review of the play 'altered from Allan Ramsay into an After-Piece'.[18] It focuses on Thomas Linley and Richard Tickell, who had recently published the score of *The Gentle Shepherd* as a pastoral opera.[19] The reviewer states:

> If there is any merit in this alteration of the favourite Scotch pastoral of Patie and Roger, it belongs all to Mr. Linley, the author of the new Accompaniments to the old Scottish Airs. Mr. Tickel has done nothing to claim on the score of poetical alterations. Where he has endeavoured to anglecise [*sic*] the dialect, he has frequently mistaken the text [. . .]. The praise of Mr. Tickel, however, was founded on the daily prints by bombastic trumpeters. [. . .] it was said, that, "since the original poem was written, a bard could not be found at once capable and bold enough to touch the mantle of Allan. The rest was reserved for the classical pen of Mr. Tickel." Should they not rather have said the classical scissars of Mr. Tickel.

While admitting praise for Linley, the reviewer's contempt for Tickell's amendments is clear. Not only does he mistake his translations, he is a presumptuous challenger who dares 'to touch the mantle of Allan'. Ramsay is, at this time, the bard of Scotland, and the author of 'the favourite Scotch pastoral'.

The *European Magazine*'s facetious review opens the door for a more critical piece in the *English Review* for February 1785.[20] This scathing response to Ward's 1785 translation of *The Gentle Shepherd* into English reprises some of the objections to Tickell's approach. The reviewer opens:

> Wherever we turn we can plainly discover that he does not understand the work he has attempted to translate [. . .] the sense is either totally perverted, or if at any time preserved, becomes flat, ridiculous or disgusting by the language in which it is conveyed. The heliconian liquor, when poured from the golden vase of Ramsay into Mr. Ward's earthen pitcher, is converted into a vapid puddle.

After outlining many examples in which Ward's translation falls short, the reviewer concludes that 'It is ungenerous to war with total imbecility', and finishes with a confession: 'Our respect for the old Scotch bard has led us to examine with some minuteness what perhaps ought to have been dismissed with a single sentence: but we were afraid that the mere English reader might have been led to form a judgement of the northern pastoral from the present distorted caricature'. This defensive review revisits significant linguistic debates – opened by Ramsay himself – while placing Ramsay at the centre of the Scottish literary canon; as the representative of 'northern pastoral'. It also introduces a national dimension to Ramsay's afterlives through its attempt to amend the 'judgements' of the 'mere English reader'. If Ramsay's 'heliconian' verse is poured from a 'golden vase', Ward's adaptation 'distorts' and 'caricatures' the original.

It should be noted, however, that not all adaptations attracted critical bile. Margaret Turner's 1790 translation of the play into English[21] is described in *World* of 8 July 1790 as worthy of 'a very great share of secondary praise'.[22] The *English Review* of November 1790 is more qualified, stating that Turner's translation is attempted 'with some degree of success', and 'as well as could be expected'.[23]

James Anderson's *The Bee* features 'Strictures of Scottish Poetry, particularly that of Allan Ramsay' by 'Timothy Thunderproof', the pseudonym for James Thomson Callender, on 21 September 1791.[24] Bemoaning the 'incessant chorus of verses in the Scottish dialect', Thunderproof asserts that, of 'poets in the Scottish dialect, the best and greatest, beyond all comparison, is Allan Ramsay'. Going against previous commentators who have cherished the 'northern bard' of Scots, Thunderproof asserts that Ramsay succeeds because he has studied 'Dryden's style with much attention'. For Thunderproof, when 'a man of sense intends to publish in rhyme, he will first make himself familiar with at least a few of the best and most popular English poets. By an attentive comparison of their works with his own, he will either learn the art of elegant composition, or the propriety of silence.' While the *English Review* bemoaned the 'perversion' of *The Gentle Shepherd* when translated into English, and the transformation of Ramsay's 'gold' into 'earthenware' when its language is diluted, Thunderproof states that Scottish poets must judge and, if necessary, silence themselves by the standards of English Augustanism. While most commentators value Ramsay's work precisely because it is not English, thus overlooking Ramsay's literary engagement with English poetry, Thunderproof's assertion that Ramsay's work is good *because* he has studied – and, by implication, imitated – Dryden, finds a ready home in *The Bee*. The periodical features many contributions by David Stewart Erskine, Earl of Buchan (1742–1829), who had corresponded with Burns regarding his linguistic choices. In a letter to Burns of 1 February 1787, Erskine admires the poet's 'little doric pieces' which are 'very beautiful, but you will soon be able to diversify your language, your rhyme and your subject, and then you will have it in your power to show the extent of your genius, and to attempt works of greater magnitude, variety and importance.'[25] Similarly, in a letter to James Currie of 14 September 1799, sent when Currie was preparing his edition of Burns's work, Erskine writes: 'Burns appeared to me a real Makar a Creator a Poet & I wished him to assume the language as well as the Character of a Briton & to throw off the masquerade garb of Allan Ramsay whom, he so greatly surpassed, & that I thought him capable of great attempts worthy of his Country & of posterity'.[26] Although Erskine betrays little of Thunderproof's admiration of Ramsay, both assert that Scottish poetry is 'improved' by keeping a constant eye on English models. Writing in *The Bee* of 2 May 1792, however, 'Arcticus', generally thought to be James Guthrie, states

that he refuses to 'give up our favourite Allan Ramsay at the frown of your commercial dictator'.[27] This disparaging reference to Adam Smith demonstrates not only 'Arcticus's' admiration for 'our favourite', Ramsay, but something of the tension between vernacular and Enlightenment which would be reflected in criticism of eighteenth-century Scots vernacular poetry as a choice between Scots defensiveness and Anglicised progress.

As the 1790s progress, a new interest in Ramsay's afterlives presents itself; that of literary tourism. In *The Ghost* for September 1796, 'Edinensis' gives an account of a visit to *Gentle Shepherd* country: 'the *tout ensemble* of the scene forcibly impresses ideas of pastoral life; and I heartily recommend to your readers a *fete champetre* at Habby's How'.[28] While encouraging an early form of literary tourism, Edinensis simultaneously helps cement Ramsay's place in the Scottish canon: 'the Gentle Shepherd is a poem of which Scotland may well be proud, and is [. . .] at least equal to any pastoral composition I have read.' This interest in Ramsay's literary locations is evidence of Ramsay's enduring literary reputation, but also the role of native literature – and the *Gentle Shepherd* in particular – in shaping Scotland's image of itself for visitors; in its self-construction as a brand.

One of the more successful poetic attempts in Ramsay's elegiac style appears in the *Edinburgh Magazine* for October 1799. 'Elegy on Lizzie Weatherston'[29] by 'R.G.' begins with an exhortation familiar to readers of Ramsay's elegies on Maggy Johnston and Lucky Wood:

> She's gane! she's gane! – o'er true the tale!
> She's left us a' to sab an' wail! –
> Auld *Clatterbanes* has hit the nail
> Upon the head:
> De'il! o' *his carcase* mak' a flail,
> Since Lizzie's dead!

As well as imitating Ramsay's elegiac tone, vocabulary and Standard Habbie vehicle, the author also gives a footnote which is heavily reminiscent of Ramsay's annotation:

> *Lizzie Weatherston*, the subject of the present Elegy, was a well-known character, who for many years kept a little change-house at Jock's Lodge, in the immediate neighbourhood of Edinburgh, and from a peculiar method of making Scotch puddings, had obtained

> the name of *Puddin' Lizzie*. Her house was long the favourite resort of many of the young people in and about Edinburgh, when inclined to an innocent homely frolic. She died in 1796.

Lizzie is a combination of the virtues of Ramsay's Maggy Johnston and Lucky Wood: if Johnston's talent is unique ale, Weatherston's is unique puddings; if Wood provides motherly comforts, Weatherston provides 'innocent homely frolic'. Ramsay's poetic style is imitated here, but so too is his democratisation of the elegy.

From the 1720s until 1800, Ramsay emerges as the father-figure of eighteenth-century Scots vernacular poetry who facilitated developments via his successors. He is a 'favourite' bard; the gate-keeper of Scottish song culture and an untutored yet inspired urban-rustic autodidact. Despite these limitations on his afterlives, Ramsay's productions, and critical responses to them, are influential. By valuing Scots classicism, defending the vividness of Scots, and lauding the divinely-touched, self-taught poet, Ramsay's readers set the tone for the development of the Scottish literary canon via Burns.

1800–1870

Ramsay's reception in the nineteenth century maintains many of these 'essential' values, but, as his reading public evolves and the canon develops, Ramsay's afterlives also evolve. Ramsay appears in nineteenth-century periodicals as a manifestation of the solid foundations of the Scottish canon, in something of a heyday thanks to the success of Walter Scott, but also, at times, of Scottish identity itself. In this period, Ramsay's work is regularly reissued with much critical comment; his proverbs and songs are part of cultural consciousness, popping up in reported conversations; his *Gentle Shepherd* is enduringly popular and frequently reviewed. Contributions to nineteenth-century periodicals reveal a gradually loudening national conversation with Ramsay at its centre, and the poet as a source of national debate. Commentators question their literary and national heritage through him. They ask if Ramsay's productions are worthy of the latest generation. They ask if he is a source of pride or embarrassment. They ask if his productions are 'pure' enough. They ask if his politics are still acceptable. They ask how he should be understood under the ever-expanding shadow of Burns, now regarded as Scotland's national bard.

Ramsay's work often provides a backdrop to agricultural labour, taking on new significance in the 1800s. Although farming practices were different from those of a century earlier, an article entitled 'Calendar of Nature',[30] published in *The Examiner* of 6 June 1819, brings Ramsay's fictional constructions together with the realities of farming:

> Haymaking is toilsome, and is formed in modern times by less happy labourers, who chiefly come over from Ireland for that purpose [. . .] The ladies may practise haymaking on a small scale [. . .] Allan Ramsay makes his lover become enamoured of the Lass of Patie's Mill, while helping to make hay:—
>
> > A tedding of the hay
> > Bareheaded on the green,
> > Love 'mid her locks did play,
> > And wanton'd in her e'en.
>
> Nothing is more lovely than a female head uncovered out of doors. It looks nymph-like, and a part of the fertile landscape.

Ramsay's rustic scene from *The Gentle Shepherd* offers nostalgic escape for the 'less happy labourers' – women and immigrant workers – undertaking haymaking. The 'toilsome' work is prettified by conjuring pastoral trysts with nymph-like women, while the cultural reference demonstrates the centrality of agriculture to the British economy. Here, Ramsay's poetry makes difficult work more palatable. Ramsay would again, as demonstrated below, be recruited for (and against) various nineteenth-century causes.

Ramsay's corpus, particularly *The Gentle Shepherd*, is an inspiration for artworks in this period, and commentators pay special attention to visual representations by David Wilkie (1785–1841). As literary renderings become artistic renderings, Ramsay's work is utilised in a nineteenth-century project to celebrate the Scottish working classes, much in the manner of Currie's almost contemporaneous account of the 'Character and Condition of the Scottish Peasantry' (1800). In Wilkie's work, as in the representations of hard farm work in the *Examiner*'s 'Calendar of Nature', Ramsay's rustic characters are, in Pittock's phrase, 'annotated as [. . .] antiquarian object[s and . . .] as an anthropological curiosity'.[31] The *Morning Post* of 13 April 1824 states that Wilkie offers 'a very interesting composition from Allan Ramsay's

unique Pastoral, the "Gentle Shepherd", the passage where Jenny and Peggy are at their rustic toilet'.[32] The commentator's description is illustrative of contemporary opinion on Ramsay:

> There are two incidents of light in this highly finished little Picture: one the morning grey, throwing a cool light on the two maidens, who are attiring before the window, the other in the back-ground, where old Symon, seated in the nook, receives a warm glow from the effect of the fire. This composition is beautifully illustrative of the poet.

The easy domesticity of the scene is selected as 'beautifully illustrative' of Ramsay's work and, indeed, Ramsay himself. Wilkie's portrayal speaks clearly to Currie's 'exhibition' of the 'striking particular in the character of the Scottish peasantry [. . .] one which it is hoped will not be lost – the strength of their domestic attachments'.[33] Here, Ramsay is understood through Burns and Wilkie via Currie in this commentary on a new Scottish painting.

Elsewhere, Wilkie is regarded as Ramsay's counterpart in the visual arts. In *The Examiner* of 15 November 1829, Wilkie's 'genius' is described as 'at once original and national'.[34] The commentator continues:

> He deals in no Academic and Acts of Parliament graces; he grapples with action and with sentiment, rather than with form; and exhibits mental energies and human passions at work. He is less eminent for imagination than for stamping off graphic images of the daily and visible world [. . .] he has no visions of angels ascending and descending. His heart and hand are with domestic life; and in scenes of household happiness or sorrow he is unrivalled.

For this reviewer, Wilkie's emphasis on the quotidian puts the painter in a category well-established in the Scottish literary canon: 'His genius seems akin to that of Allan Ramsay; and he has the same graphic taste, and the same skill in delineating ordinary life [. . .] while the freedom of his touches, and the fascination of his grouping, remind us of Burns. On all his early compositions his native land is impressed very legibly; and we love him for it.'

By now, Ramsay is understood through a number of recent and

contemporary contexts. Although a lone voice, Timothy Thunderproof's contributions to *The Bee* in the 1790s valued Ramsay for his resemblance to Dryden; now, Ramsay is confined to the domesticity of the Scottish cottage in the 'daily and visible world'. This valuing of the down-to-earth (i.e. Scots) aspects of Ramsay's corpus demonstrates that he is understood via the recent popularity of Currie's Burns, but also that this selective image of Ramsay was becoming central to Scottish canon-building. Although recent criticism has begun to challenge this limiting view of eighteenth-century Scottish poetry by exploring Ramsay's, Fergusson's and Burns's compositions in English alongside those in Scots,[35] the nationalist-critical contention that the English poetry of Ramsay, Fergusson and Burns should be discarded for its 'inauthenticity' is long-standing. Pinkerton, writing in 1786, bemoans 'the low humour of Ramsay' and asserts that Scots poets' English works 'deserve no praise'.[36] George Douglas, writing in 1911, states that, 'What they wrote in English was uniformly undistinguished, and represents them at their worst'.[37] In 1952, Sydney Goodsir Smith states that readers should 'neglect' their 'English works',[38] while Allan MacLaine, writing on Fergusson, asserts: 'his poems in English [. . .] are imitative, trite, and worthless as literature'.[39] By contrast, Susan Manning asserts that traditional accounts such as these 'uniformly assume an absolute distinction between the sterile competence in English and the "discovery" of a "natural" Scots idiom'. This assumption, Manning argues, is a 'creation of the cultural politics of sentiment which has had the [. . .] effect of diminishing the ambitiousness of the *oeuvre*.'[40] Although Ramsay's 'oeuvre' has been 'diminished' by such readings, he is nonetheless commended as a 'national' poet.

As though in response, a piece in the *Hull Packet and Humber Mercury*, dated 29 April 1828, outlines, by anecdote, Walter Scott's opinions on Ramsay and Burns: 'I thought Burns's acquaintance with English poetry was rather limited; and also, that having twenty times the ability of Allan Ramsay and of Ferguson [*sic*], he talked of them with too much humility as his models; there was, doubtless, national predilection in this estimate'.[41] As well as emphasising this Scots vernacular literary 'evolution', described by Grosart as 'pseudo-apostolic', Scott blames Burns's literary tastes, somewhat dismissively, on 'national predilection'. Again, this reporter is content to pin Ramsay in a category labelled 'Scottish; rustic; domestic; autodidact'. As we have seen, these estimations have been, until recently, unchallenged by critics.

As the nineteenth century progresses, new editions of Ramsay's work are published in response to a growing appetite, not only for Scots vernacular poetry following Burns's success, but also for older works of Scottish literature. The *Caledonian Mercury* of 17 December 1838 offers a review of Chambers's edition which demonstrates Ramsay's evolving literary persona.[42] The edition is part of a series entitled 'The People's Edition of Standard Works', reflecting Ramsay's assured place in a Scottish, if not British, canon. Despite this, the reviewer states that Ramsay's 'sketches from nature are so faithful as to be universally acknowledged by Scotsmen, and by them only can their beauties be properly appreciated'. Evidence of this, according to the reviewer, 'is the many hundreds of pilgrims that annually resort to the scene of his pastoral comedy'. Ramsay is a poet worthy of 'pilgrims', and a sure source of literary tourism. However, the contention that his work can 'only' be appreciated by Scots plagues nineteenth-century commentators as the British Empire grows and Glasgow is increasingly seen as the imperial 'second city'. Noteworthy in this review is the importance of Ramsay's corpus to a working class audience: 'Come, then, Chambers, with your "People's Edition" of our ancient favourite [. . .] and we will endeavour to while away everyday realities'. Just as 1819's 'Calendar of Nature' remembered Ramsay's pleasing rustic scenes at the heavy work of haymaking, Ramsay is here a welcome escape from the hard realities of nineteenth-century working life.

An opposing view is found in Glasgow's *Chartist Circular*, dated 27 February 1841.[43] Here, Ramsay is no hero. As this commentator writes, Chartism is at its height, and the paper can rely on a politically defined readership. While for the *Caledonian Mercury* reviewer, Ramsay's work is a wholesome escape for 'the people'; for the Chartist, it is an abhorrence. According to the author, while Ramsay's works were 'much celebrated in their day', 'few of them are now appreciated beyond their merit, which is in general below mediocrity'. Despite being at odds with the majority of commentators, this author is uncompromising in his view of Ramsay as unworthy of workers' time and money. By extension, Ramsay's work is a means by which the Chartist commentator can gauge the literary (and, by implication, political) progress of his own time: while admiring 'beautiful lines' in *The Gentle Shepherd*, he states that some passages 'are coarse and vulgar; and his songs [. . .] are not esteemed by the musical amateurs of the present day'. This reviewer also compares Ramsay negatively to Burns, but

not, as has become commonplace, for artistic reasons: 'The genius of Ramsay was less independent and more fawning than the genius of Burns. Ramsay breathes none of the manly, spirited, and high minded aspirations of Burns. His volumes are tarnished by fulsome dedications and servile flattery to the patronizing aristocracy'. Although seemingly ignoring Burns's reliance on aristocratic patronage, the author, while conceding Ramsay's genius, states that 'servile flattery' taints his corpus. For the reviewer, *The Gentle Shepherd* 'is tarnished by rude sentiments of unmanly adulation to the titled great, while his unmerited degradation of their vassals excites in the mind of every honest reader contempt and pity for the people-debasing politics of his poem'. While for Chambers, Ramsay is worthy of inclusion in the 'People's' library, this commentator sees Ramsay's work as a means by which to control 'the people'. The gendered descriptions utilised here are significant: Ramsay's 'unmanly fawning' and 'unmanly adulation' stand in opposition to Burns's independent manliness and, by implication, the manliness and vigour of Chartism.

Although allowing that there is beauty and humour in *The Gentle Shepherd*, the reviewer sneers at the play's restoration themes, the 'genius of latent nobility' in Patie, and the way in which 'the latent divinity of aristocratic birth shines in Peggy'. The reviewer's message to Chartist readers could hardly be misread:

> The poem is a stigma on the people, and a panegyric on the aristocracy. It contains no holy aspirations for civil and religious liberty, although the scene is laid at a time in Scottish history when the people were boldly struggling for their rights. What a glorious opportunity for exciting his poor countrymen to demand and maintain their liberties, had he embraced it [. . .]. But he threw it away, and making the vassals of Sir William ignorantly rejoice at his return, with the restoration of the divine authority of kings, he degrades them into a herd of brutes, to be ridden and trampled on at will by the latent divinity of legitimate despotism.

This portrait of the play and poet is incompatible with the people's hero of the *Caledonian Mercury* whose productions help workers escape from drudgery, and with Ramsay's now-established afterlife as an unpatronising celebrant of Scottish domesticity.

The commentator concludes by recalling his own experience of reading *The Gentle Shepherd* at school, where its 'political tendency' was not explained. Through Ramsay, he contends, the seeds of Toryism are sown and grow, 'like weeds in the garden'. The reviewer ends with a pronouncement for Chartist educators: 'In Chartist schools let no such books be read, nor principles taught; but should they at any time fall into the hands of youth, let the teacher explain their pernicious doctrines, and prevent them from impeding the progress of liberty, the triumph of intellect, and the independence of the people'. This commentator's is a lone voice in Ramsay's reception. However, it illuminates another side of the national conversation regarding his literary inheritance. For this reviewer, Ramsay's work is an unpalatable remnant of an unpalatable past which, if unquestioned, encourages deaf and blind servility and complicity in the working classes. As such, it is to be roundly rejected.

In *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* of 6 September 1846, in the traditional trawl of major periodicals, a journalist reflects on *The Mirror* for that month,[44] in which appears a series entitled 'Poets of the People', commencing with Ramsay. According to the *Lloyd's* journalist, 'the editor appears to show in all things his sympathy with the people, and his adherence to their cause'. In contrast to the Chartist commentator, Ramsay is here a literary hero of and for the people.

Elsewhere, Ramsay appears in reviews of the many Scottish-themed 'entertainments' taking place north and south of the border. These reports demonstrate that there was significant appetite for performances of his works on the stage, and a growing interest in all things Scottish in London's theatres. In London's *Daily News* of 9 June 1846, 'Mr Wilson's Vocal Entertainments', which took place 'at the Music-hall in Store-street', is reviewed.[45] Wilson offers 'a selection of the songs of Allan Ramsay, which he prefaced by an interesting sketch of the life and character of that famous Scottish poet'. The reviewer stands in opposition to the *Caledonian Mercury* commentator who asserted that Ramsay can only be understood by Scots, stating that Wilson 'has singular facility in making the peculiarities of the Scottish dialect (or, perhaps, we should say, language) intelligible to Southron ears [. . .] the audience fully understood and enjoyed the humour of the northern bard'. This is confirmation, from outwith Scotland, that Ramsay's work is capable of travelling beyond his native country. Scottish nervousness about Ramsay's vernacular is marked in his nineteenth-century

reception, while this London commentator worries about referring to Scots as a 'dialect', postulating that it should be described more properly as a 'language'. Whether or not this reflects Scottish political insecurity is open for debate.

Back in Scotland, Ramsay is further cemented as a national literary icon. In the *Caledonian Mercury* for 23 July 1855,[46] readers are informed of the new commissions of the Royal Association for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in Scotland:

> After mature deliberation with regard to what should be done in the way of engraving for the ensuing year 1856, the committee have commissioned from Mr Thomas Faed, of London [. . .] a series of designs illustrative of the poem of 'The Gentle Shepherd' by Allan Ramsay [. . .] Faed is particularly adapted gracefully to pourtray [*sic*] the beautiful pastoral pictures of his native country, so graphically described by the pen of Ramsay, the committee feel assured that a national work will be produced of no ordinary merit, and which will prove highly acceptable to members of the Association, whether in hall or cottage.

Ramsay is again consecrated in a 'national' work, demonstrating his assured place in the Scottish canon, and in cultural consciousness. However, while devotions are made to Ramsay's achievement in the official 'hall', they are, by implication, more meaningful when made in 'the cottage'. Later in the century, much attention is paid to official commemoration via reports of the new statue of Ramsay on Edinburgh's Prince's Street. The inauguration is covered by, among others, the *Belfast News-Letter*, the *Manchester Times* and *Newcastle Courant*.[47] With this memorial, Ramsay is again confirmed as a 'national' literary icon.

Two reviews from the early 1870s encapsulate many of the themes of Ramsay's reception over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With reissues of David Herd's antiquarian editing comes new interest in Ramsay. In a review of one such reissue in the *Glasgow Herald* of 15 January 1870, the reviewer draws attention to the evolution of taste in the intervening century:

> Herd is reproduced exactly as it was printed in 1776; and in those days, when Allan Ramsay's sly poetic tales were read with avidity,

> there was no reason why any publisher would feel the least squeamish about some of the warm and plain expressions in this collection. There they are, and they do look a little out of place to the more sensitive taste of 1870; but to have mutilated the songs would have spoiled the collection [. . .][48]

This reviewer, swimming against the nineteenth-century tide of bowdlerisation, demonstrates that, although taste is now more 'sensitive', original texts should be preserved.

A review of a reissue of Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany* from the *Glasgow Herald* of 27 July 1871[49] responds to the contemporary appetite for reissued editions, asserting that, while this 'biblio-maniacal movement is altogether admirable [. . .] it does in particular remind us too much of the disentombment of mummies from very respectable, if not immortal, pyramids of dust.' Although Ramsay's efforts were 'well-meant', this reviewer asserts that only Burns was capable of purifying the Scots language and its poetic traditions. Indeed, as the reviewer argues, some aspects of the *Miscellany* would be 'deemed entirely inadmissible in any modern collection of songs [. . .] intended to be read or sung by the young men and maidens of the present generation'. Although Ramsay's work is a remnant from a coarser past, the reviewer allows that it holds irresistible appeal:

> To Scotland at home, and to all the Scotlands abroad that have sprung from the 'mither-stem', we should imagine the republication [. . .] will be a most welcome event; and it is not difficult to imagine that in far-away huts and in the backwoods of America, in Australian shanties at the limits of vast sheep-runs, and in the rude tents of gold-diggers, Scotchmen will bend over this book, bursting with laughter or shaken with honest tears.

This reviewer reflects the new concerns of imperial Scotland and Britain, alongside a growing awareness of the value of texts such as Ramsay's to those of the Scottish diaspora, particularly in domestic devotions of memorialising the motherland. The reviewer concludes that, for these reasons, 'Ramsay's collection, with all its imperfections on its head, is a perfect treasure'.

It is clear from this analysis of Ramsay's afterlives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that his work was never far from literary and national

conversation. In the first century of his reception, Ramsay's example was helping secure a set of priorities for the Scottish literary canon which, despite limiting the diversity and ambition of Ramsay's oeuvre, nevertheless proved to be immensely influential. Ramsay's reception operates in this period both forwards and backwards. Although often understood in hindsight, and in particular through the lens of Burns, Ramsay's work is frequently presented as a wellspring which not only influenced other, major eighteenth-century Scots vernacular authors, but also the priorities and preferences of those who constructed the Scottish literary canon throughout the nineteenth century. These constructions – of the distinctiveness of Scottish literature via vernacular Scots; a heightened interest in portrayals of domestic life; a pride in supposed meritocracy and inspired autodidacticism – obviously finds its apex in Burns, but remains powerful throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical responses to Scottish vernacular literature. By the nineteenth century, these constructions remain, but are embedded further through the work of Currie on the 'Scotch Peasantry' and through visual representations of Ramsay's work by artists such as Wilkie. If Ramsay is seen, in this period, as a remnant of the past, that past is multifaceted: in the increasingly industrial nineteenth century, it is a golden age of agricultural order, but elsewhere, that past is too coarse for contemporary tastes and, in an extreme example from the *Chartist Circular*, a means of reinforcing traditional social structures, and to keep the working classes firmly under control. Although there are diverse responses to Ramsay and his works, his is a canon-defining example which is a regular source of discussion in a national cultural conversation. The unveiling of his statue on 25 March 1865, where Edinburgh's Old and New Towns meet, demonstrates the permanency of his cultural contribution and influence.

Notes

1 The Ruddiman edition of 1721 was preceded by a text of 1720, published in Edinburgh 'for the AUTHOR at the *Mercury*, opposite to *Niddry*'s-Wynd'. This is a bound copy of existing poem-pamphlets. These pamphlets included 'The Battel: or, Morning Interview' (1716), the 'Elegies on Maggy Johnston, John Cowper and Lucky Wood' (1718), 'Lucky Spence's Last Advice' (1718), and 'Tartana: or, the Plaid' (1718), and others.

2 John Pinkerton, *Pinkerton's Ancient Scottish Poems* (Edinburgh: Creech, 1786), pp. cxl–cxli.
3 A. B. Grosart, *Robert Fergusson* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1898), p. 38.
4 Robert Crawford, Introduction to '*Heaven-Taught Fergusson*': *Robert Burns's Favourite Scottish Poet* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), p. 2.
5 *British Journal*, 14 November 1724, Vol. CXIII, p. 9.
6 Murray G. H. Pittock, 'Allan Ramsay' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004–16). Accessed at www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/view/article/23072?docPos=1 21 March 2017.
7 *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1737, p. 507.
8 *Scots Magazine*, January 1777, Vol. 39, p. 44.
9 *Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1742, Vol. 12, p. 491.
10 See dmi.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/-771538652515903408 3. Accessed 21 March 2017.
11 Murray Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 37.
12 *Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1744, Vol. 14, p. 445.
13 *Newcastle General Magazine*, December 1756, Vol. 12, p. 640.
14 Allan Ramsay, 'Preface' to *Poems* (Edinburgh: Ruddiman, 1721), p.v.
15 *Scots Magazine*, January 1758, Vol. 20, pp. 20–21.
16 *London Evening Post*, 2–4 February 1758, Vol. 4719.
17 *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 17–19 November 1778, Vol. 2759.
18 *European Magazine*, January 1782, Vol. 1, pp. 49–50.
19 Thomas Linley and Richard Tickell, *The overture, songs, & duetts, in the pastoral opera of The gentle shepherd: as performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane* (London: Printed for S. A. and P. Thompson, 1781).
20 *English Review, or An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature*, February 1785, Vol. 5, pp. 193–96.
21 Margaret Turner, *The Gentle Shepherd; a Scotch Pastoral, by Allan Ramsay, attempted in English* (London: Printed for the Author, by T. Bensley, 1790).
22 *World*, 8 July 1790, Vol. 1096.
23 *English Review, or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature*, November 1790, pp. 347–50.
24 *The Bee: or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, 21 September 1791, Vol. 5, pp. 54–58.
25 Robert Chambers (ed.), rev. William Wallace, *The Life and Works of Robert Burns*, 4 Vols. (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1896), Volume 2, p. 46.
26 Erskine to James Currie, 14 September 1799, in Gerard Carruthers, Kenneth Simpson and Pauline Mackay (eds), *The Letters of James Currie (1756–1805): Robert Burns's First Editor*. Online edition; see jamescurrie.gla.ac.uk/details.php?id=74. Accessed 27 March 2017.
27 *The Bee*, 2 May 1792, Vol. 8, pp. 313–17.
28 *The Ghost*, September 1796, Vol. 40, pp. 57–60.
29 *Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany*, October 1799, pp. 303–04.
30 *The Examiner*, 6 June 1819, Vol. 597.
31 Pittock, *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, p. 163.
32 *The Morning Post*, 13 April 1824, Vol. 16634. Wilkie's 'The Cottage Toilet' is held in the Wallace Collection, Hertford House, London. See wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=65286. Accessed 30 March 2017.

33 James Currie (ed.), *The Life and Works of Robert Burns; with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism on his Writings*, 4 Vols (Liverpool: Cadell and Davies, 1800), Vol. 1, p. 26.
34 *The Examiner*, 15 November 1829, Vol. 1137.
35 See Corey Andrews, '"Almost the Same, but Not Quite": English Poetry by Eighteenth-Century Scots' in *The Eighteenth Century*, 47:1 (Spring 2006), pp. 59–79, Rhona Brown, *Robert Fergusson and the Scottish Periodical Press* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).
36 Pinkerton, *Ancient Scottish Poems*, p. cxli.
37 George Douglas, *Scottish Poetry* (Glasgow: McLehose, 1911), p. 160.
38 Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Robert Fergusson* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1952), p. 13.
39 Allan H. MacLaine, *Robert Fergusson* (New York, NY: Twayne, 1965), p. 22.
40 Susan Manning, 'Robert Fergusson and Eighteenth-Century Poetry' in Crawford (ed.), '*Heaven-Taught Fergusson*', p. 88.
41 *Hull Packet and Humber Mercury*, 29 April 1828, Vol. 2267.
42 *Caledonian Mercury*, 17 December 1838, Vol. 18555.
43 *The Chartist Circular*, 27 February 1841, Vol. 75.
44 *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 6 September 1846, Vol. 198.
45 *Daily News*, 9 June 1846.
46 *Caledonian Mercury*, 23 July 1855, Vol. 20535.
47 *Belfast News-Letter*, 6 October 1863, Vol. 32591; *Manchester Times*, 21 January 1865; *Newcastle Courant*, 7 April 1865, Vol. 9928.
48 *Glasgow Herald*, 15 January 1870, Vol. 9372.
49 *Glasgow Herald*, 27 July 1871, Vol. 9580.

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